FREE

TAGA SPORTS

JANUARY - MARCH 2018

NO SUCH THING AS A TRICK TO BUILDING MUSCLES

MEETING MAMI IKEDA IN THE KITCHEN

FROM SEPAK TAKRAW TO BADMINTON

MP UNITED: A DECADE OF THRIVING

TOP 5 TRENDY FOODS OF 2018

LOSING BIG, WINNING BIG

Q&A: RUNNERS ALL

SHARING TOP BILLING IN THE POOL

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editor'snote

The start of a new year is also predictably the time when people start an exercise regimen, driven by guilt to the gym after eating too much over the holidays. Being unable to fit into one's pants is a surefire way to motivate anyone to hit the gym.

Also predictably, learning to accept one's new (and bigger) pants size becomes part of the learning curve, joining a slew of other failed promises and unfulfilled resolutions that typically wait to be resurrected as soon as another new year comes around.

Dre Delos Santos sees this human tendency to seesaw between one's better angels and failed resolutions as a sure way to fail at shedding fat. The title to his article in this edition of TAGA *Sports* says as much: "The trick to building muscles and shedding fat? There's no trick." ***See Page 6.***

This edition features the debut of Mami Ikeda, who will feature healthy recipes in this and future editions. As shown by her Facebook feed, Mami dotes on her cat but she also enjoys her time in the kitchen, making it seem like she just has to wave her ladle to come up with healthy and flavorful dishes. She will show us how the magic is done. She will even show you a picture and tell you where to buy some of her more exotic ingredients. We hope you will enjoy experimenting with Mami's recipes as much as she loves concocting new dishes for the healthy crowd. ***See story on Page 10***

Our resident nutrition expert, Kaisa Anderson, has penned a noteworthy article about trendy food this year. Oh, wow, that reminds me of the explosion of the terms "artisanal" and "gluten-free" last year. At one point, "sundried tomatoes" were a thing. Now, only '80s kids talk about the stuff. ***See story on Page 4.***

TAGA *Sports* associate editor Mark Rabago goes to the pool in this edition of the magazine, highlighting the impressive record-smashing feats of young swimmers Ashley Dangol and Isaiah Aleksenko. ***See story on Page 10.*** They may be diminutive in stature but they are giants in their age groups, holding 33 of the CNMI's national age group records between them. That's no mean feat, considering that, in Ashley's case, she merely got into swimming for its therapeutic value.

We hope you enjoy this latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. For questions, criticisms, letters to the editor, and suggestions, email them to editor@saipantribune.com.

Sinseramente,

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Managing Editor

COVER ART
Ashley Dangol and Isaiah Aleksenko of the Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan smile for the camera at the Kan Pacific swimming pool in Marpi.

Contributed Photo

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writer's bloc

KAISA ANDERSON, RD

Kaisa is a registered dietitian with Food & Nutrition Services of the CNMI Public School System. Regrettably, her article in this edition will be Kaisa's final story for TAGA Sports magazine as she intends to focus more on her work with PSS.

MAMI IKEDA

Mami considers herself the daughter of the Koto Restaurant that was ran by her late parents in Susupe back in late '70s to early '80s. A member of disaster relief team C.O.R.E. and the Commonwealth Racing Federation, and an advocate for the Commonwealth Cancer Association, Mami loves being a crazy cat mom and herb gardening. To reach her, email mami96950@gmail.com.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Roselyn once weighed 115lbs when she stopped eating pork and beef, had a cup of rice per day, no sodas, and exercised regularly. That was 16 years ago. To reach her, email Roselyn at roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com.

JON PEREZ

Jon Perez briefly tried the Japanese martial art of karate when he was in high school. He did not meet Mr. Miyagi but he became an expert doing "wax on, wax off." To reach him, email Jon at jonathan_perez@saipantribune.com.

MARK A. RABAGO

Mark Rabago recently took up running again. He joined the 2017 Turkey Trot and at least finished higher than the number organizers assigned to him (No. 125). He has no plans to run competitively, but would like to join 5K, 10K, and 15K runs in the future. Mark runs because it makes him happy and gives him a sense of accomplishment. To reach him, email Mark at mark_rabago@saipantribune.com.

DRE DELOS SANTOS

Dre is a personal trainer and strength coach in Honolulu, Hawaii. His favorite superheroes are Batman and Captain America.

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The trick to building muscles and shedding fat?

There's no trick

DRE DELOS SANTOS
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

The goal of simultaneously building muscle and shedding body fat is tricky. But, yes it can be done. With a smart plan and steadfast approach, it's possible.

1 Consistency reigns supreme

Perhaps the most obvious of the bunch—steady improvements in your body composition—requires discipline and consistency. It doesn't happen overnight.

There are going to be times where you're going to feel completely drained and burnt out. That's just the nature of the beast. The thought of having to start all over again, though, is just bone-numbingly painful.

I've spoken candidly on this numerous times. Rather than taking long breaks or pressing the pause button, consider turning the dial down. This ensures you maintain a respectable amount of workload while still moving in the right direction.

Never stop. You can slow down a bit, but don't stop.

Taking intermittent sabbaticals leads you nowhere. Moreover, nobody likes the idea of taking one step forward and two steps back. The ones who are making steady gains are the ones who train consistently.

Three-to-four days, 52 weeks out of the year.

2 Use high ROI exercises

Any time we invest our time or money, we're obviously looking for a huge return. It's much the same with training. You're far better off sticking to the basics than spending hours on end doing crunches and curls.

Think about it, there's a reason why compound movements such as the squats, deadlifts, pull-ups, and presses are the cornerstone of most sensible programs; they're tried and true. They stimulate your entire body. It's not the end-all, be-all approach but you're ahead of the curve once you start mastering the basics.

Simplicity, not complexity. 'Nuff said.

3 Train with a purpose

You're obviously not going to produce substantial gains just going through the motions. To some degree, your workout has to bring you to a point where you almost start to question your sanity. It kind of has to suck (in a good way). I'm not saying you have to constantly beat yourself up, but training with a purpose goes a long way. So, work your butt off.

As a point of reference, the main reason why I make it a priority to get in a workout is because I want to look and feel good. Also, I don't want to have to take medication as I get older.

4 Nutrition and lifestyle must take precedence

For whatever reason we have this natural inclination to think that we can get away with subpar nutrition with more exercise. I understand the rationale behind working out so you can eat whatever you want, but it's rendered useless with destructive eating habits. In other words, stop eating—and drinking—so much crap.

A good training program is equally important, but you can't expect magical things to happen because even the best method can be neutralized with poor nutrition. You need to support your training with good daily nutrition habits. This doesn't necessarily mean you should be perfect, but at some point you need to have that honest conversation with yourself, "enough is enough."

5 Recovery matters

For years, I was convinced that more training equates to faster results. Admittedly, there is an element of truth to that. However, unless you've been injected with the super soldier serum, it's highly unlikely that you'll achieve optimal results with that approach.

Now, with a ton of real-world experience and application behind me, it's surprising to a lot of people when I tell them more exercise isn't always better. In fact, it's one of the biggest learning curves that most have a hard time coming to grips with—because psychologically, we always think we're behind the eight ball.

Your training has to match your recovery capabilities.

2018 SPORTS CALENDAR

JANUARY

Double Distance Meet: This two-part event is organized by the Saipan Swim Club and tests swimmers' endurance as they compete in long distance races at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool.

NMSA First Meeting of the Year: Northern Marianas Sports Association convene to select the top performers of the past season and brief members about the calendar of activities of each federation for 2018.

Dolphin Swim Club Classes: The third swim club on island holds ocean swim classes from Monday to Thursday and at the pool every Saturday.

FEBRUARY

Saipan Little League Baseball: Little League baseball action starts as teams battle for the Major, Junior, and Senior League divisions crowns. This season, SLLB will also introduce the Minor division for 8 to 9-year-old players.

PSS/NMIFA U14 Interscholastic Soccer League: School pride is at stake in this competition for middle school students both in public and private.

White Coconut Tennis Classic: This is Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association's second tournament for the 2017-2018 season and the most unique among its events as winners are awarded not with trophies or medals, but with coconuts.

MARCH

SSC International Meet: Clubs from Guam, Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Federates States of Micronesia will travel to Saipan to challenge the island's swimmers in a three-day competition.

Saipan Marathon: More than 500 runners, both on and off-island, will be racing in the CNMI's biggest sporting event of the year.

PSS/McDonald's All Schools Championships Qualifiers: Northern Marianas Athletics brings together student-athletes from public and private schools as they fight for slots in running, throwing, and jumping events in NMA's annual competition.

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TOP 5 TRENDY FOODS OF 2018

KAISAANDERSONRD
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

New scientific discoveries occur every day; the same goes for nutrition. As advances in the field of nutrition occur, so do the food trends in hopes to best nourish our bodies in the best ways possible. Along with these new science discoveries, however, are new food trends with sometimes unusual texture, odd smells, and weird names, but highly promised nutritional benefits. With the nutritional benefits of these foods growing with more popularity, here are foods worth trying in 2018.

1 KOMBUCHA

This is a fermented drink made with black or green tea. The slightly bubbly concoction is created from a bacterial culture strain of yeast known as SCOBY. More and more, it can be found in grocery stores and has become a regular beverage for some. Tea already contains the healthy benefits of antioxidants and properties to detox, but the fermentation of the beverage adds the benefits for the small intestine and digestion. Our intestines contain thousands and thousands of different bacterial strains that aid in digestion. Kombucha contains these good bacteria, called probiotics, to help build and sustain our healthy balance of digestive bacteria. If you experience difficulty when doing the good ol' number two in the bathroom, consider drinking a glass of kombucha every day in 2018.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sauerkraut is an example of fermented food.

2 FERMENTED FOOD

When I was young, I was under the impression that fermenting food was food going bad and rotting. This such is not the case. The health benefits of fermented food are gaining momentum as a healthy food option. Fermented food include sauerkraut or kimchi, to name a few. Similar to kombucha, when these foods are fermented properly, they produce healthy bacterial cultures that have been claimed to help fight cancer and help reduce mid-section fat. Some animal studies have shown it can help digest cholesterol and lower levels. When choosing to enrich your diet with more fermented food, be sure your sauerkraut is pasteurized and your kimchi is properly prepared.

3 RICHLY COLORED VEGETABLES

There are too many vegetables that should be a part of your diet; focusing on one would not do this section of the article justice. When referring to brightly colored vegetables, the colors that come to mind are mainly dark greens, and the bright oranges and reds. Some of these food packed with vitamins and minerals are broccoli, spinach, bell peppers of all colors, and tomatoes. Not only does increased vegetable consumption provide high amounts of fiber and lower calories, these food are also high in antioxidants that help combat dangerous cells from potentially becoming cancerous. If the other food on this list are not up your alley, I can promise increasing color in your diet with vegetables is always an enjoyable way to go.

4 KEFIR

Although it is growing in popularity and will be a big food trend in 2018, kefir has been a common food in Central Asia for thousands of years. Kefir is described as a dairy product fermented, with a tangy, slightly carbonated taste containing strains of healthy bacteria. The beverage is started from a kefir grain, a grain whose appearance compares similarly to miniature cauliflower florets. Through the fermentation process, similar to yeast being activated, healthy cultures of bacteria are produced. Despite further research needing to be conducted, it is believed the healthy bacteria from kefir is beneficial for those with lactose intolerances, as the bacteria helps metabolize and strengthen the gut's tolerance of dairy products. Other benefits you could experience in 2018 from this beverage may be its supposed ability for easy digestion and boosting the immune system.

5 CHIA SEEDS

Chia seeds have already gained momentum for quite some time, but they are just as popular as ever. Chia seeds have been popular since their 1980's debut as grass grown from clay figurines but the nutritional benefits these tiny seeds contain have made them an encouraged food as part of your diet. The biggest nutritional benefit of chia seeds is the touted Omega 3 fats they contain. Don't forget to soak the seeds as this opens the husk of the seed and exposes the nutrition inside the seed. Great ways to make chia seeds a part of your diet is mixing them with infused water overnight, or adding some milk and cocoa powder to make a chia seed pudding. Regardless of how you add them in, they are relatively low in calories and offer a good dose of the recommended healthy fats that all diets need.

In case you didn't notice, more and more scientists, along with the health industry, are looking into food that create healthy stomachs and digestive tracts. Ultimately, this part of our body is where most of our nutrients such as calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals are absorbed. It only makes sense learning how food that promote stability, strong immune systems, and digestion would be of focus. I will admit they are unusual food, but everything is worth a try once. Good luck on your health journeys in this bright new year of 2018!

Pumpkin Soymilk Miso Soup

MAMIIKEDA
TAGA Sports Contributing Writer

Ever since I declared a "tofu diet," my day starts and ends with soy products. I replace dairy products such as milk, cream, and cheese in existing recipes with soy products and even add them to make recipes healthier. And this is the ultimate—miso soup with *quatro* soy products (miso, soymilk, tofu, and edamame)! What's good about miso soup is that you can dump in whatever you have in the fridge, but soymilk goes really well with starches like pumpkin and sweet potatoes, and proteins such as chicken and salmon, instead of tofu. Get your veggies and proteins in with this heartwarming soup! Makes 3-4 servings.

1

2

4

INGREDIENTS

1/8 round pumpkin (chopped into bite sizes)
1/8 napa cabbage (chopped into bite sizes)
1 box tofu (can be soft or hard, diced into 12-16 pieces)
2 dried shiitake mushrooms (soaked in hot water and sliced into 5-6 pieces each)
1/2 cup frozen edamame
2 cups water (including water used to soak dried shiitake mushrooms)
2 cups soymilk (unsweetened)
1-2 tablespoons hondashi (to your taste)
2 tablespoons miso paste

Pinch of dried wakame seaweed
Pinch of ground roasted white sesame seeds

1. Place prepared ingredients in a pot, pour water and hondashi, and cook on high heat until pumpkin is soft.
2. Lower the heat, then add the miso paste by dissolving it in the soup with a ladle or chopstick/fork (to avoid chunks of undissolved miso).
3. Sprinkle dried wakame, then add soymilk. To retain the best flavor, DO NOT bring to a boil after adding miso and soymilk.
4. Sprinkle ground roasted white sesame seeds before serving.

Top the soup with condiments such as ginger, garlic, hot pepper flakes, and yuzu-kosho or spicy citrus, to give it a kick. The one in the photo shows my favorite, yuzu-kosho (zested Japanese citrus, hot pepper, and salt).

WHERE TO GET

- Kirkland organic soymilk: Joeten Hafadai, Twins Market, and some Chinese stores
- Dried shiitake mushrooms and roasted sesame seeds: New XO Market and other Chinese stores
- Dried wakame seaweeds, ground sesame seeds, S&B yuzu kosho: Himawari

ASHLEY DANGOL AND ISAIAH ALEKSENKO

Eating swimming records *for breakfast*

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Records? What records?

That seems to be the dictum of both Ashley Dangol and Isaiah Aleksenko, who are stalwarts of the Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan. Between them, Ashley and Isaiah own 33 of the CNMI's national age group records. Ashley has 21 under her belt, while Isaiah has 12 of his own. »

ISAIAH ALEKSENKO
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賞状

Nepal-born Ashley began swimming not so much to break records; she just wanted to get well.

"When I was 6 years old. I had bowlegs and needed exercise. My parents thought swimming exercised the whole body," she told TAGA *Sports*.

Her key to becoming a better swimmer? Setting goals, going to practice, and giving 100 percent each time—during both practice and actual races. "Most importantly is having a great coach and family support. To get success in water, it took a lot of hard work and dedication in and out of the water. The workouts were hard and coach is unpredictable!" she said.

Of the close to a dozen CNMI age group records she has, Ashley said her most cherished one is the 8-and-under 100m butterfly, while her most memorable swimming meet was the 2015 Tokyo Junior Sprint.

"I got it really early and no one else tried it at that age before me, so mine was the first and that makes it special to me," said this Grace Christian Academy student.

Ashley Dangol, center, joins her Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan teammates for a practice session before competing in Japan a few years ago.

A video footage of Isaiah Aleksenko shows him giving a brief message during the awards ceremony of a tournament in Japan.

Ashley Dangol proudly wears the medal she won during the 2016 Guam Swimming Championships in Hagatna.

"Many meets have made memories, but my first Tokyo Junior Sprint in 2015 was the most memorable. I never expected to go to the finals and had no clue what to say and do!"

Isaiah, who was born in Russia, was always fond of the water so it wasn't a big surprise that he joined a swimming team at the tender age of 5 years old.

"The sport is a part of my life. Since I was small I've always been active and love any water activities. It's fun and I feel free in the water," he told TAGA *Sports*.

He believes he was able to break CNMI age group records through hard work and the support of his coaches and mother.

"Sometimes it's so difficult to keep the same routine day by day. It takes a lot of patience and discipline," Isaiah said of the challenges of the sport.

Among his dozen records, his favorite is the 800m freestyle "because I really wanted to get at least one record for long distance."

Like Ashley, this Saipan Community School seventh grader's most memorable meet was the 2015 Tokyo Junior Sprint.

"Because I got MVP and I will never forget that big achievement in my life," he said.

Tsunami Saipan head coach Hiro Kimura said Ashley and Isaiah owe their achievements in the pool to their dedicated parents. He also said the two's adherence to Tsunami Saipan's strict rules also led to their success.

"It is that parents' trust, the coach's guidance, and understanding the team's policy that have made them record-breakers. Without that trust and understanding, they cannot be special," he told TAGA *Sports*.

Kimura vividly remembers that the two actually didn't have auspicious starts during their career at Tsunami Saipan.

"Ashley cried and would not get into the water a lot of times. Isaiah got out of the water as soon as it was cold and escaped to somewhere every time," he said, laughing.

However, through hard work and dedication, Ashley and Isaiah have become the tip of the spear for Tsunami Saipan, Kimura said.

"Both of them just aged up in the summer, but they are already breaking the CNMI record under 12 years old. Also, they are able to get AAAA time in the first year of aging up," he said.

Kimura has high hopes for his two protégées and wishes that someday they could swim for their respective native countries.

"It would be great if they could become a representative of their parents' home country and participate in World Championships/Olympic Games," he said.

Given the chance, Ashley wants to pursue a swimming career after college.

"I would like to try to find something in or related to swimming, but if I can't, I would like to become a teacher," she said.

When asked what he would like to do when he grows up, Isaiah's response was short: he wants to be a professional swimmer.

Ashley has a tip for other young swimmers: age or size does not matter in the pool. Going to practice also always makes a difference.

"Thinking positive and eating healthy are also important," she added.

Isaiah said newcomers to swimming should never quit the sport, "because one day you will achieve a big goal that you will never forget in your life."

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The regulars that attend Brazilian jiu-jitsu classes at Cuki Alvarez's TrenchTech gym in Garapan pose for a photo.

Samuel Alvarez, fourth left, poses for a photo with his uncle Cuki, right, and other students of the latter's jiu-jitsu classes.

EARNING HIS STRIPES IN JIU-JITSU

JON PEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Learning something new is already difficult. But going into it with a disability can be doubly challenging.

That was the challenge facing Samuel Alvarez, one of the few in the CNMI who has been diagnosed with a mild form of autism called Asperger's syndrome.

A 15-year-old sophomore at Mt. Carmel School, Alvarez spends a lot of time at his Uncle Cuki's gym, TrenchTech, learning and training in Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

"He just started last year and he has already earned his first stripe," said his proud dad, Boss Alvarez. "He's been training for about a year-and-a-half now but, [in terms of] consistently and getting serious lessons, I would say about six months straight."

Earning a stripe in your belt is being rewarded by your instructor for regularly attending classes and learning the techniques that show gradual improvement in execution.

Samuel's uncle, Cuki, has seen how his nephew grew not only as a jiu-jitsu student but also as a person. "He's been enjoying the classes. I see that he's having fun in what he's been doing. It is great having him in our classes. This goes to show that [Brazilian jiu-jitsu] is for everyone and is not only limited to just the athlete of a fighter."

Sam has enjoyed every moment of his time at his Uncle Cuki's gym and has already adjusted to the rigors of learning jiu-jitsu.

"I was pretty bad at first in grappling and ground fighting. Sometimes you really have to simulate the training sessions like in a real fight," said Sam. "But the drills are a real help from time to time. Like if someone tries to choke you. I sometimes spar with people who are larger than I am. I continuously enjoy learning the drills and doing it right is already an accomplishment on my part."

Despite his disability, Alvarez is quite a smart student. In fact, many of those diagnosed with Asperger's are known to

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Samuel Alvarez, right, receives his first stripe after religiously training in BJJ.

be smart but have trouble with their social skills.

"He has friends and he has good grades in school. He's spectacular when it comes to mathematics. He's off the charts. Sometimes, he even helps his siblings," said his mom, Sisi Alvarez.

Boss and Sisi Alvarez are just grateful that Samuel had caring teachers and a school counselor who alerted them that something was different with their son.

"When he was 3 years old, his Early Head Start teacher noticed that there were some issues with him since he tended to be alone and had some sensory issues back then," said Boss. "But we're glad that there are tools and people who helped us learn about his condition."

Unlike the so called "classic" autism, where people diagnosed have difficulty with social and communication skills, those diagnosed with Asperger's have milder symptoms but still have unusual behavior and some problems with language and intellectual disability.

Boss said they introduced Sam to sports while growing up and he tried playing baseball and soccer. But it was in jiu-jitsu where the Mt. Carmel School sophomore seemed to excel and enjoy the most. TS

Purebred BJJ Guam professor Steven Roberto, left, oversees one of the training sessions.

Samuel Alvarez, top, performs one of the moves he has learned against his uncle Cuki.

MP UNITED A DECADE

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

For 10 years, MP United Football Club has compiled a very long list of accomplishments, which would need extra space if we enumerate all of them. So we will sum them up in one word: Thriving.

> We would rather invest our time in athletes who are motivated, coachable, hard-working, disciplined, and great teammates over a selfish group of talented athletes."

Members of the MP United Boys U18 Team gather for a photo before playing in a local tournament in 2014.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

OF THRIVING

MP United founder Sue Knecht said she is proud to see the club prosper because of the commitment of its leaders, sponsors, coaches, parents, volunteers, and players.

From a group that started with less than 50 players (mostly youth), MPU now has over 200 members across various age groups (U6, U8, U10, U12, U14, and U17), men's and women's adult teams, and masters division.

From these pools, the club is able to hone talents that are then tapped by the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association to represent the CNMI in international competitions.

Players, equipped with years of experience and better knowledge of the sport, also turned into coaches, imparting theirs skills to younger club members. Several players who were done suiting up for the club either play in the collegiate ranks or pursue higher education off-island. MP United players also engage in non-sporting activities in the community, including participation in a foreign exchange program.

While players do their thing at the pitch, their parents, volunteers, »

10 for 10

TAGA Sports talks to some people who've been a part of MP United in its decade of existence.

PHOTOS By ROSELYN B. MONROYO

MP United Football Club's Gillian Villagomez, left, dribbles away from two Shirley's FC defenders during a girls U15 division game in the NMIFA youth league at the Francisco M. Sablan Middle School Field.

MP United players and officials participate in a beach cleanup drive on Saipan.

Volunteer coach Bada Lee huddles with the MP United U8 players during a youth festival event at the Oleai Sports Complex Field.

MP United's Rinto Takahashi, left, and Rintaro Miyawaki celebrate after their victory over Paire FC in the U12 division of the NMIFA youth league at the Hopwood Middle School Field.

1 How was your first day or first practice or game with MP United?

MP United was rebranded from an old team that used to be the Sharks, if I remember correctly. I was one of the first players to play on this "new" team and I played for the team until the day I left Saipan to pursue a college education and a commission in the U.S. Army through West Point. I felt a true bond with my teammates and grew to care for them. They taught me what it meant to be part of a team of brothers. Through all the differences, we played together as a team and helped each other improve on the field and many of us played for the national team that gave the CNMI its first international victory (against Macau in Taipei). I cannot capture the profound sentiment and gratitude I feel toward the club. …I can only hope that those who read this can infer that MPU has helped mold this simple individual [into one who] carries the lessons learned from this experience every day of his life.

—**Jake Tiger Lee**, *West Point cadet*

2 Your best game with MP United? Why?

It's either the game we played [TanHoldings FC] in the finals during the day and beat them 4-3 because it was such a close game and we proved the crowd wrong since they were cheering against us or when we played them at night and beat them 3-1 with only nine players because we really put our hearts out on the field.

—**Jehn Joyner**, *University of San Francisco student*

3 The best part of coaching MP United team/teams?

MPU has a close-knit group of players that play football together, but resonates a family feeling among its members. My first experience coaching for MPU was for the U14 boys division back in 2009. Today, I still keep in touch with some players on the team. Every year, key players leave Saipan to pursue college careers; however, the younger players always filled those crucial roles. It's the relationship built within the club level that allows younger players to rise up to a new challenge. Most MPU youth club coaches are part of the club's U18 and men's teams [as] volunteer[s]. Having this connection early on with older players helps players transition easily from one age group to the next.

—**SeoungJoon Lee,** *SPC, U.S. Army*

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and MPU officials take care of other business, holding fundraisers, dropping off players to games and staying there to cheer for them, and bringing food and drinks during matches and other club gatherings.

As for its sponsors, one company stands out, IT&E, which has been the club's major supporter since Day 1. Triple J Motors and I Love Saipan also back MP United.

Attitude over talent

MPU has built a good number of talented players but talent alone will not grant you entry into the club. MPU would rather have players with good attitude and lesser talent than great players with bad behavior.

"We would rather invest our time in athletes who are motivated, coachable, hard-working, disciplined, and great teammates over a selfish group of talented athletes," MPU vice president and technical director Norman Del Rosario said.

"If there are any players who have attitude problems, the coach of that team should work on addressing them prior to giving them spots on the team. Our coach will never just ignore the issue and hope the player resolves it on his own. If a coach makes a valid attempt to help the player and the player refuses to change, that player must be let go. No one individual is above the team," he added.

Building the character of its players is way more important than producing high-level players; MPU wants to prepare its members for life after football.

"More doors will be opened for them if they behave well on and off the pitch and be a good role model to others," Del Rosario said.

Continue development

There's no stopping MPU from moving forward. To boost its momentum, the club is shopping for a coaching director, according to MPU president Vickie Izuka.

"We have had the privilege to work alongside some of the most talented kids on the island over the past 10 years and we hope to continue it. For us to continue in the next 10 years, we are hoping to find a director of coaching with experience and knowledge to guide our club to a higher level and develop more players for the CNMI national teams," said Izuka, who is joined on the MPU board by vice president Lydia Tan, treasurer Rose Soledad, and general secretary Ana Hilario.

"We will continue to encourage our players to reach for their dreams and goals in life, encourage them to get higher education to empower them," she added.

4 The most memorable championship game? Why?

My most memorable championship was the 2013 FA Challenge Cup finals against TanHoldings FC because this was the match that we showed to the people that, when our backs are against the wall, our resilience and heart will get us the victory. Just before halftime, we lost two of our players so we were playing 9 v 11 most of the first half, all the way to the 90th minute of the game. During the halftime, the score was 1:1 and we were in a very disadvantageous position. At half-time, we agreed that we will take a big risk by attacking more; we lacked in numbers but we all believed that the higher the risk, the greater the reward. We were attacking them the whole 45 minutes—something they were not expecting—and we got the win. It was also special to win that match as we honored the victims of Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines. MPU U18 was in the Philippines for Pilipinas Cup and we've made new friends and we wanted to show them that they have friends on Saipan.

—**Enrico del Rosario**,
Northern Kentucky University student

5 What made you decide to join MPU as one of its officials?

It is a great privilege for me to able to join MPU as an assistant team manager. My son is one of the players of MPU and there was a need at the time for a team manager and I was glad to serve and help out the team/kids. I believe MPU is a strong team and we embrace its mission to support the young generation to be excellent in sports. We are glad to be part of the MPU family.

—**Eric Abragan**, pastor,
Life in the Son Christian Fellowship

6 Who is the MP United player or players you look up to? Why?

Joon Lee and Kennedy Izuka. I look up to Joon because he is a great leader and role model on and off the field. His personality and mindset inspire me and he has influenced me so much that I would not be where I am now if it weren't for him. Kennedy is also a player I look up to. I was lucky to have him as a coach and I also played with him on the field. I've watched and learned from how he plays.

—**Alex Park**, *MPU U17 team captain*

7 As a parent of an MP United player, what are you thankful for?

As a parent, you engage your child not just in academics but in other activities as well to promote health, friendship, and integrity. I'm thankful that through the officers, coaches, managers, players and parents of MPU, my child has forged some of the best friendships, learned to engage in physical activities, learned important life lessons, and has had many exciting travel opportunities. Winning championships are bonuses, because the real trophies come in the form of accepting defeat when you lose, getting back up, and moving forward. Simply stated, I'm thankful that MPU teaches more than how to handle a soccer ball on the pitch but also how to handle life's challenges.

—**Teresa Kim-Tenorio,**
associate judge-CNMI Superior Court

8 Your wish for MP United?

My wish is to see MPU continue to set high standards of play and development, continue the respect and friendships on and off the field.

—**Nick Swaim,**
MPU alumni and former CNMI National Team player

9 One of the most important lessons you learned while playing or coaching for MP United.

A single moment can change the whole dynamic of the game. This is why soccer is such a beautiful and emotional game. One simple mistake and the team loses. But on the flip side, one brilliant play and the whole team could celebrate a victory. That's why I enjoy the sport.

—**Kennedy Izuka**, *University of Washington student*

10 Describe MP United in one word.

The one word I would use for MP United is "thriving" because of the commitment of its leaders, sponsors, coaches, parents, volunteers and players. I'm so happy to see the success!

—**Sue Knecht**, *MP United FC founder*

RUNNING Q&A SERIES

In a first of what is being envisioned as a series of Q&A articles on how athletes keep motivated, TAGA *Sports* picks the brains of seasoned runners Manny Sitchon and Ben Babauta. Both are staples in the island's running scene and those who want to take up the sport of running can learn a thing or two from them.

How did you get into running?

Manny Sitchon: Because of friends who were into this sport.
Ben Babauta: I've been running the past 10 years to maintain my physical fitness.

How do you sustain your motivation?

MS: My first motivation was to quit smoking. Fifteen years ago I used to smoke one to two packs a day. Running is now an integral part of my life. It is already a lifestyle. It's already a part of my routine. Life seems to be incomplete whenever I miss this activity. There even comes a time when I'm irritated when I'm unable to run.
BB: It's a "drug"…Once you start, you want more—5K, 10K, 21K, 42K…endurance running.

What are your favorite running spots on island?

BB: My favorite is the Beach Road Pathway: Chalan Kiya (my home) to T Galleria (my work) and back home. It's a total of eight miles.

How often do you run in a week and how long?

MS: When I was younger I used to run four to six times a week. Unfortunately, we are not getting any younger, so I now run at least two to three times a week.
BB: Minimum twice a week and training season (January-March) four times week.

Do you prefer running in the morning or evening and why?

MS: It doesn't matter whether I run in the evening or morning. Whatever fits into my schedule I make time to run. If I'm busy in the morning, I'll run in the evening and vice versa. I just alternate them.
BB: Morning is best for me. It starts out my day.

Do you eat before/running or after?

MS: I run or exercise in the morning even without taking breakfast. I just make sure I had a good dinner the day/night before the run. After all, stored energy is the one used during the morning run/exercise.
BB: After running I drink coffee and or (homemade) shake.

What's your pre-run meal/snack? What's your post-run meal/snack?

BB: Pre-run: cereal with banana and post run: steak!

How do you keep yourself hydrated during a run?

MS: During long runs, I see to it that I carry with me energy bars, gels, anything for hydration. Whenever I run longer than 10K I always carry a bottle (water or Gatorade, Powerade, Pocari, etc.) for hydration. For run longer than 15K, I carry energy gels, ID (identification), and, most important, an extra dollar (for emergency). Long runs ranging from 20K or more is when I carry a camelback water hydration.
BB: Pocarri Sweat (sweet and salt water).

Do you stretch before and after a run and why?

BB: I stretch before the run. It's 10-12 minutes of full body stretching.

What are your preferred running shoes and apparel for running?

MS: I am very selective when it comes to running shoes. I am big and heavy runner so I am prone to injury. I make sure to replace my shoes whenever it is due for replacement.
BB: Brooks running shoes, running tights, and dry-fit shirt.

Do you run with any gadgets? What are they and why?

MS: The only electronic gadget I use is my Garmin triathlon GPS watch. It measures the distance, heart rate, pace, speed, elevation, etc. Connect it to Strava and it will also tell you when it is time to replace your shoes by measuring the amount of distance accumulated by your shoes. I don't carry musical gadget because they're just a distraction.
BB: No gadgets at all.

What's better: Running alone or with a running mate?

MS: It's always better to train with a buddy. You share stories, motivations, running experiences, plans, and sometimes for safety while running. Also, a running partner is there to push you harder, share running/training tips…but it is also important not to rely on having a running partner. You will [not always] find a running partner. Learn to run alone. As much as possible, when you look for a running partner, look for someone with the same capability as you or you'll always be left behind, or better not mind if he/she goes ahead of you.
BB: I prefer alone. It's my "me" time.

Why do you like running? What do you get from it?

MS: Running is already part of my lifestyle and I think I will continue to run as long as I am alive, or as long as I can. It's already a part of my routine. There is always a feeling of euphoria or contentment every time I am done with a run. …The sense of accomplishment is always there.
BB: I like running because it give me more cardio and I get my fix.

Any tips for aspiring runners out there?

MS: Take it slowly when you start running. Increase your distance according to your capability. A lot of beginners immediately increase their running distance too soon. This is bad as it causes injuries. Buy a good pair of running shoes and buy those shoes according to your feet structure. Also join races to keep your competitive spirit flowing, even if you are just competing against your personal best. Always hydrate when you run, especially when running in hot conditions. Do not run for *pogi* points (just for show). Run to become healthy.
BB: Be committed and enjoy healthy living.

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

FROM SEPAK

TAKRAW TO BADMINTON

DEETHERALMONDJEFFEDRALIN
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

I have always loved sports, fascinated by how intense and competitive it could get.

The first sport I got into was *sepak takraw* or kick volleyball. I competed with my friends and cousins daily. *Sepak* was my escape from troubles. I would spend hours playing in the middle of the road.

I also learned how to play table tennis, more popularly referred to in the Philippines as ping-pong. My mom encouraged me to learn the game as she herself was a ping-pong player. I was taught by my fourth-grade teacher. She was tough on us. It didn't take long before I decided to stop because I wasn't having as much fun as playing *sepak*.

Another sport I was introduced to was taekwondo. One of my uncle's friend was teaching a class. I joined with my cousins. That was when I found out how competitive I could get. I would sometimes get overly aggressive to the point of hurting them because of how competitive I would get. It didn't take long before I stopped doing taekwondo; I missed playing *sepak*

One day I found out that our family was moving to Saipan. Not being a fluent English speaker, it was hard to communicate with others at first. I had a few friends who spoke Filipino and they had to translate for me.

While attending school, the only sport I saw people playing were volleyball, baseball, soccer, and basketball. I was looking for people who play *sepak* but I was told that no one even knows about the sport. That's when I decided to try something new. I started playing basketball in fifth grade and got into track and field.

I eventually gave up on track and focused more on basketball. I tried out for the school team and surprisingly made it, having only started playing the sport.

At that time, I would squeeze in practice sessions for basketball; it was the closest I would feel to playing *sepak*. I was playing basketball almost daily.

In junior high, my parents urged me to try badminton—something I didn't want to do at first.

I've always thought that the sport wasn't intense enough, that it was boring and only for the elderly, a backyard sport where you just hit the shuttle back and forth.

Badminton got interesting, however, when I saw how intense and complicated it was. The smallest mistake in the court can cost you a game, since the shuttle can reach an absurd speed of 300 miles per hour.

There is also footwork to master in order to get to the shuttle quicker.

The first time I set foot in a badminton court wasn't fun. I was bored the whole time, waiting for the shuttle to come in my direction.

It wasn't until the summer of my freshman year that I started playing badminton frequently, mostly because I met people who changed my perspective of the sport. These people eventually became my best friends. We played every night and even mornings over the weekends.

As I was learning the game, those who were much better than I was didn't want to play with me. There were only a few players who would volunteer to teach and play with a novice like me. But it didn't take long for others to see the improvement I made and started to recruit me to their team. It actually took a little longer for me to be on a team since they wanted to create a new team called Community Badminton Club for youth players.

Joining CBC was the start of my journey with badminton. We had a schedule where we would train every Saturday morning. All the trainings we did dramatically improved my speed and power. I would also try to imitate professional players who I've watched on videos on how they moved.

As we improved we also joined tournaments. My first ever tournament was unsuccessful. I thought that I had improved enough to become a champion at C level. My defeat left a bitter taste since I was expecting myself to win mixed doubles and singles. This defeat motivated me to work harder. After my first tournament, I started playing every morning and evening every day of my summer. The improvement showed during a tournament, as I won more games than the last. I only played two tournaments at C level before they ranked me up to B. My first tournament at B level was unsuccessful too, since there were a lot more experienced and skilled players in the division. This tournament was my turning point, since the players at this level were the ones who didn't want to play with me as a novice. It didn't take awhile for me to catch up to them and win. The victory was the sweetest. At this point my goal was to get to A level, then beat my friends and our coach since they were always a step ahead of me.

One summer, my parents and I took a vacation in the Philippines. I took the opportunity to play with varsity and top-tier players. I was challenged by one of the trainers in a game of singles. He made me realize that having power, speed, and being athletic weren't enough to win against him and my friends. Realizing the mental needs of badminton took me to another level. Having to understand and a feel for the game made it easier for me. After coming back to Saipan, I was excited to play against my friends and show them the refinements of my game.

I did get to beat my friends in badminton and that resulted in me being unmotivated to play since I have already achieved my goal. Luckily, my mom challenged me with a bet if I have the skill to beat her. Also, defeating the person who trained us was another achievement.

I hope that I have changed many people's perspective of how badminton is played since majority of the people on island thinks it's an easy sport. If you like an intense and fast-paced sport, then badminton is for you.

BEFORE

AFTER

BEFORE

AFTER

BRYAN VALENTON

	INITIAL	FINAL	TOTAL LOSS
BODY FAT	28%	16%	40%
WEIGHT	203 LBS	165.4 LBS	37.6 LBS

losing big,

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

His clothes did not fit him well and his tummy always went ahead of him. Roldan Pelagio took these as cues to sign up for the TanHoldings' Lose Big Win Big Saipan Edition 2 last year.

"I was 204 lbs, my heaviest since 2008. I gained weight but I thought I could easily shed it off by weight training, exercising, and proper eating. However, I had struggle issues on Saipan as I was not exercising too often and, most of the time, we had parties and I was drinking alcohol," said Pelagio, who also finds it hard to have regular exercise because of his unpredictable work schedule.

"Seeing my very big tummy and my clothes being too tight on me, I know I wanted to change how I look," Pelagio said.

He was done with the first step of his "makeover" when he chose to join the contest, while the second step nearly did not materialize.

"My first partner backed out as she was scared since I am a very strict and a disciplined person, so I ended up with Bryan Valenton," Pelagio said.

It turned out that having Valenton as a partner was a good choice. Valenton wanted to test if he is still capable and driven enough to get rid of his excess weight.

Valenton tipped the scale at a high 204lbs too, and was at 203 lbs during the competition's first weigh-in, while Pelagio was nearly 200 lbs (198.9 lbs).

Once they registered, Valenton and Pela-

BEFORE

AFTER

BEFORE

AFTER

ROLDAN PELAGIO

INITIAL
- BODY FAT 22.9%
- WEIGHT 198.9 LBS

FINAL
- BODY FAT 9%
- WEIGHT 160 LBS

TOTAL LOSS
- BODY FAT 60%
- WEIGHT 38.5 LBS

winning big

gio, who named their team Barney & Friends, mapped out a weight-loss plan for three months. Pelagio focused on the nutrition side of their strategy, while they devised their own workouts/activities.

Pelacio watched a lot of documentaries about plant-based eating. He was glued to "What the Health" and "Forks over Knives" films and was inspired to try them out since a lot of people are into it. According to Pelagio, plant-based eating means avoiding all forms of animal food like beef, pork, chicken, dairy products, fish, and oil.

Valenton was on his own diet and only followed Pelagio's in the last month of the contest.

As for their activities, Valenton did mostly volleyball, badminton, calisthenics, and core training, while Pelagio was into running, calisthenics (pushups and pull up) and skipping rope.

Barney & Friends topped the first weigh-in and, though Valenton gained weight in the third, that only motivated him more.

"The weigh-in two weeks before the competition ended was very crucial, because 'Team Bugbog' (the eventual runner-up) was ahead of us. Roldan heard and learned about intermittent fasting so he devised the plan and used it for the last two weeks. We still did plant-based eating, but included the intermittent fasting. Fasting for 16 hours a day and eating only in what we call the eight-hour window. It turned out great," Valenton said.

"In the last week, we cut out some water—drinking little by little when necessary, just like what MMA fighters and boxers do during the weigh-in before a fight," Pelagio added.

During the final weigh-in, Pelagio weighed 160 lbs, shooting over his target weight of 165 lbs and had 9 percent body fat. Valenton tipped the scale at 165.4 lbs and reached his target body fat of 16 percent—from 40 when the contest started.

Although the competition is now over and they've won, Pelagio is still with his plant-based eating, while Valenton is still into sports.

"No more cravings for me. Food addiction is what makes us fat and store fat. Everything is already prepared for us, we are lazy and rely on fast foods. It is important to know what you eat and what you put inside your body. I still do calisthenics, some running, and a lot of walking. There is really no program anymore, just moving my body more," Pelagio said.

Scuba diving safety begins above the water

STEVE WATERS
Sun Sentinel

For Jim Mathie and the crew on his boat *Chiefy*, figuring out what they want to do on a dive begins before they ever get in the water.

"We usually have a plan as to what we're attempting to try to do," said Mathie, a retired Deerfield Beach fire chief.

"I think it's important to have that discussion. And you have to have that discussion above the water, because once you get in the water, it's hard to communicate."

That not only makes diving safer, but also more enjoyable.

"To me, the reason why I dive is to be stress-free," Mathie said. "So the more that we can relax and take it easy, the better your dive is going to be."

Planning made a difference on a recent lobstering and spearfishing trip out of Hillsboro Inlet in Florida with Mathie, Ken Udell, John Strunk and Andy Rubin.

At each spot, Mathie and his divers talked about what the reef looked like, what parts of it they should swim along, what they might see and what to do if conditions were not what they were expecting.

Before one dive, Mathie talked about how the current should be running to the south, which would allow us to swim with it for the length of that particular reef. But he also said that if the current was running to the north, we should immediately surface because it would be too hard to fight the current and there was nothing worth investigating to the north.

Soon after reaching the bottom, where there was a north current, Mathie gave us the thumbs up sign so we knew to head back up to the boat.

"It's knowing the reef and knowing the spots and what are you going to do," Mathie said.

Mathie is the author of the how-to lobstering book "Catching the BUG" and the how-to spearfishing book "Catching the Spear-it!" Both books, which are available online and at local dive stores, talk about safety considerations, something the former firefighter does not leave to chance.

Tourists and snowbirds who go diving, in many cases for the first time since last winter, need to plan their dives and go over simple things like the hand signals they'll use underwater.

Mathie's crew uses an OK signal, with the thumb and index finger touching, to indicate that all is well. A thumbs-up signal means go to the surface, so a diver doing that to say he or she is OK could cause confusion.

When a diver does have to go to the surface early, the safest thing is to follow the line to the dive flag, after you let your dive buddy know you are leaving.

"That's important, because you don't want to just surface way far away from the flag and the boat doesn't know where you are," Mathie said.

Mathie also is particular about the location of his dive buddies when hunting for lobsters and fish, who also let each other know when they see something shootable or catchable.

"It's really important that you're side by side as opposed to follow the leader," he said. "A lot of folks, when they're not hunting, they will actually go follow the leader because that's kind of the way they were taught. They have a divemaster or a dive instructor and they're showing you different things on the reef.

"With hunting, I don't want you behind me, I don't want you in front of me, I want you to the side of me. This way, when Ken stopped for a lobster and he squawked a little bit, I was, 'Oh, OK, I'll go over and check and see if he needs some help.' "

"That's part of the safety plan," Udell said. "Honk and stop, this way we're not getting separated and I'm not spending half my dive trying to find you as opposed to hunting and trying to find lobster."

Personal Trainer
Learning to scuba
It's a water sport, but scuba diving is risky and more like flying an airplane than swimming – you must be formally trained to do it.
Open Water Diver Certification
Open Water Diver
Required for people 15 or older (those age 10 to 14 take different training for a junior certification)
Physical condition?
Exam by a physician is required
Swimming ability?
You need not be an expert, but good basic skills are required
Finding a course
Scuba shop or club can recommend a teacher appropriate for your goals
How long is training?
Depends on whether you are studying intensively, for example at a resort, or in your spare time
DECOMPRESSION TABLE
scuba dooba do.
Several class sessions
Several pool sessions
What equipment do I need for class?
Check with teacher; these are the basics, and some can be rented:
Mask
Snorkel
Air regulator
Air tank
Weight belt
Knife
Boots
Fins
Source: Recreational Scuba Training Council
Graphic: Helen Lee McComas and Paul Trap
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